

**TEACHING TEACHERS TO WRITE: A DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP APPROACH
TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

by

Robert Rocco Buffone

B.A. Clarion University, 1994

M.A. Penn State University, 1998

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
the School of Education in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2017

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation was presented

by

Robert Rocco Buffone

It was defended on

June 1, 2017

and approved by

Charlene A. Trovato, Ph.D., Administrative and Policy Studies

Jennifer Lin Russell, Ph.D., School of Education

Dissertation Advisor: R. Gerard Longo, Ph.D., School of Education

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Teachers who write proficiently are more likely to possess the skills to teach students to write proficiently. This study examines how a principal recognized the condition behind poor test results; limited professional development in writing, which was a contributing factor in weak student performance in writing. As a result the principal facilitated/initiated teacher led writing labs that engaged teachers in the writing process while at the same time developed and made use of teacher leaders to create a philosophy that the teachers of proficient student writers are proficient writers. In other words, before teachers were asked to implement writing instruction in the classroom, they first had to learn how to write. Facilitated by the principal and led by teacher leaders, the lab is a collaborative planning environment where job-embedded professional learning occurs. The principal implemented the solution, professional development writing labs, and is now evaluating its outcomes based upon the perceptions and feedback of the teacher participants.

Professional Development grounded in distributive leadership formed the foundation for the writing labs. The writing lab approach afforded teachers continuous, meaningful and directly applicable practice in a safe space that instigated commitment, growth, change, and outcomes. A

two-fold approach fostered the outcomes: teachers teaching teachers and teachers doing the work they were asking their students to do. Both approaches resulted in proficient teachers as writers and proficient teachers of writers. As a result of these approaches, three specific actions are discussed in this evaluation: teachers developing their skills as writers, teacher leaders emerging as a result of job embedded professional development, and the principal assuming the role of a learner in the process. If students are to become better writers, it was theorized that teachers needed to practice writing and study writing pedagogy to determine how and where to implement an improved writing curriculum.

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PREFACE

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. R. Gerard Longo for his consistent support, for his patience and for his encouragement through my doctoral research over the past three years. In addition to my advisor, I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Charlene A. Trovato and Dr. Jennifer Lin Russell for their insightful comments, encouragement, and also for the challenging questions which helped guide my research.

I would like to thank Valerie Piccini for the time she took to create a culture of writers that spread across staff and students. Your commitment to excellence coupled with your craft of writing was contagious. Our conversations throughout this research were extremely supportive and assisted in my successful completion of this study. I am also grateful to the Franklin Regional Administration Dr. Gennaro Piraino, Dr. Mary Catherine Reljac, and Dr. Richard Regelski for their support during my research at Heritage Elementary School.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my family. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my wife Christine who allowed me the time to write while she took over the responsibilities of the household in order to provide me the space needed to complete this dissertation. Finally I want to thank my daughters Payton and Addison for allowing your dad to do his “Pitt work” while at the same time being there to always provide me a hug and a smile. I am looking forward to giving my time back to the three of you now that this doctoral journey has ended.

1.0 PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

This problem of practice focuses on the use of a professional development lab to grow the writing skills of elementary classroom teachers. The lab is a collaborative planning environment where job-embedded professional learning occurs. The lab is led by teacher leaders and is a place where teachers and administrators learn and grow alongside one another as writers; doing the work they are asking their students to do. Teachers of proficient student writers are proficient writers. In other words, teachers who write proficiently are more likely to possess the skills to teach students to write proficiently (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). The decision to focus on professional development writing labs was due to poor performance on the school's Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) state test results in writing. Many recent studies have shown that teachers have limited skills for writing proficiently in narrative, opinion, and informational genres (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Salah-Din & Miller, 2008; Kiuahara et al., 2009; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Two years ago school data showed that only 67% of Heritage Elementary students were proficient writers, with no advanced writers reported. These poor test results, coupled with the fact that professional development in writing has been limited, may account for weak student performance in writing (see Appendix A: Root Cause Analysis). If PSSA writing scores were to increase, it was theorized that the Heritage Elementary staff needed to practice their writing and study writing pedagogy so as to be able to determine how and where to implement an improved writing curriculum. "No activity is worth doing unless it promises to

make the central part of a teacher's work more successful and satisfying" (Sagor, 2000, p. 4). Working together the faculty and the principal created a professional development action plan designed to improve pedagogy in the teaching of writing (see Appendix B: Gantt Chart Timeline for 2016-17 Inquiry).

When seeking purposeful school change in the teaching of writing, the principal and teachers at Heritage Elementary School stepped away from technical fixes that time and again circled back to the starting point. Instead we created a PLC seeking meaningful change and led by colleagues. Teachers and the principal adopted the role of student writers, opened up their notebooks, put pencil to paper, and took the first step in refining their understanding of the writing process. The question presented to the adults in the writing lab was: "How can we get better at what we do and how do we create a writing culture in our school?" The answer was (and still is being) found by learning alongside each other in a PLC in a co-constructivist environment. With trust and persistence, teachers are making progress as they work beside their principal, colleagues, and students. In order for a writing culture to develop at Heritage Elementary, the adults and the children must come to value the practice of writing.

This study uses distributive leadership principles to develop the writing skills of elementary classroom teachers in job embedded professional development. Using an evaluation research approach, the investigator examines how the principles of distributive leadership may inform a professional development writing lab that was designed to help elementary teachers improve their writing abilities. Sustainable school improvement requires educators to work together cohesively, sharing a common vision and supporting each other's efforts in achieving that vision. Transformation of this kind requires teachers and principals to work together outside

of their comfort zones, adopting a growth mindset, and in most cases, doing work similar to that of their students, becoming the lead learner in their own classrooms.

The professional development standards suggested by Learning Forward (2011) support the planning of professional development that is ongoing, is connected to practice, and is directly applicable in work settings; these standards also support the planning of professional development, improvement of teaching skills, and acknowledgement that “educators learn in different ways and at different rates” (p. 3). One way to foster the learning of an adult is through an inquiry approach (Menter, Elliot & Hulme, 2011). Inquiry allows teachers to try to “develop some new knowledge and understanding” (p.3), while they attempt to “destabilize previous ways of working” (p.19). Eliminating the common stand-and-deliver professional development programs and instead allowing teachers to write alongside students may facilitate this destabilization (Cole, 2004, 2013).

For the culture of writing to make a complete turn-around it must include two very important components: teachers as writers and students as writers. This evaluation research aims to arm teachers with the information, tools and strategies needed to move beyond the dead end technical fixes of the past and forward into systemic change in how writing is learned and taught (Zellermayer, 1990). By sharing resources throughout this process, the school’s success can inspire and foster continued growth and sustainable change.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Where do teachers learn to write? Where do teachers learn to teach writing? Is it dependent upon past educational experiences or staff development? More than 65% of K-12 teachers stated they were minimally prepared or not prepared during their college coursework to teach writing (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). How can principals expect students to learn how to write across the three genres (narrative, opinion, and information) if teachers are not confident in their own ability to write within each genre? (National Commission on Writing, 2003; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kiuahara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). After looking at below average PSSA writing scores, these questions framed the discussion between administration and teacher leaders.

2.1.1 Questions

1. Who are the leaders in this professional development effort?
2. What are these leaders doing?
3. How do these emerging leaders view this approach to professional development as something different than the usual approach to PD?

2.2 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traditional formats of professional development such as workshops or institutes have been criticized for not providing educators the time, the activities, or the content needed for growing teachers' understanding and for developing significant transformation in their classroom pedagogy (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989; Birman, Desimone, Porter & Garet, 2000). Desimone (2011) discusses the core features and conceptual framework for effective professional development and states that "understanding what makes professional development effective is critical in understanding the success or failure of school reform (p. 68)." Teacher education is mostly associated with higher education institutions that offer teacher certifications and degrees. However, a crucial element of teaching teachers to teach transpires on the job after their college classes have ended. Job embedded professional development can provide opportunities to collaboratively learn effective instructional strategies (Hopkins & Spillane, 2014). In saying this, Desimone along with Wayne et al. (2008) concur that minimal valid methods exist to study the effectiveness of professional development. For that reason, Desimone (2009, 2011, 2014, 2015) suggests five core features encompass professional development: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. Specific details of the five features are listed below.

1. Content focus: Professional development activities should focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content.
2. Active learning: teachers should have opportunities to get involved, such as observing and receiving feedback, analyzing student work, or making presentations, as opposed to passively sitting through lectures.

3. Coherence: What teachers learn in any professional development activity should be consistent with other professional development, with their knowledge and beliefs, and with school, district, and state reforms and policies.
4. Duration: Professional development activities should be spread over a semester and should include twenty hours or more of contact time.
5. Collective participation: Groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school should participate in professional development activities together to build an interactive learning community (Desimone, 2009, p. 184).

Desimone points out that the five core features should encompass professional development although additional features are suggested to measure effectiveness. She suggested a conceptual framework that outlined how professional development can affect teacher and student results. The framework assessed for three types of results: “Do teachers learn? Do they change their practices? Does student achievement increase as a result?” (p. 71). The four steps from the framework (2009) are listed below.

1. Teachers experience professional development
2. The professional development increases teachers’ knowledge and skills, changes their attitudes and beliefs, or both.
3. Teachers use their new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction.
4. The instructional changes that the teachers introduce to the classroom boost their students’ learning (Desimone, 2009, p. 184).

Recent research on professional development in the United States by Desimone and Stuckey (2014) developed several insights that are being used to improve the 2009 framework so teachers

can transfer the concepts to practice (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Their improvements center on four concepts:

1. Changing procedural classroom behavior is easier than improving content knowledge or inquiry oriented instruction techniques
2. Teachers vary in response to the same professional development
3. Professional development is more successful when it is explicitly linked to classroom lessons
4. Leadership plays a key role in supporting and encouraging teachers to implement in the classroom the ideas and strategies they learned in the professional development (p. 254).

While research points out essential components to include in planning professional development, these components alone do not assure teacher learning. “Changing teachers’ subject-matter knowledge in meaningful ways is difficult” (p. 254) but there are two theories to increase the chance that the change in teacher learning is more likely; the theory of change and the theory of instruction (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen & Garet, 2008). These two theories are meant to increase the likelihood of change. Professional development may prove ineffective if either one of the theories fails. The first theory, the theory of change, is defined as the change a teacher exhibits in their knowledge and instruction as a result of the PD. The second theory, the theory of instruction, is described as changes to instruction along with enhancement to student learning. While the research described earlier (Desimone & Garet, 2015) suggests various components, it is evident that two theories underlie effective professional development. These two theories are evident in effective PD and result in a change to classroom instruction along with an improvement to student learning (Desimone, 2015).

In addition to the theory of change and theory of instruction, there are specific key principles that form the foundation of effective professional development. As indicated

previously, studies suggest twenty or more hours of collaborative professional development that directly connect to classroom instruction. In addition to duration and connection, the timeliness of the PD lessons should coincide with the pacing of classroom lessons. Finally, effective PD requires support from leadership during the actual learning as well as throughout the classroom implementation (Desimone, 2009, Desimone & Garet, 2015).

2.2.1 Social Network Perspective

Moolenaar (2012), emphasizes the importance behind studying the “pattern of social relationships among teachers can significantly enhance the understanding of the ways in which teacher collaboration takes place and contributes to student learning , teachers’ instructional practice, and the implementation of reform” (p.7). Considering a social network perspective could contribute to answering why certain teachers go to other teachers for specific advice on pedagogical techniques (Desimone et al., 2014; Hopkins & Spillane, 2014). Degenne and Forse (1999), classify social networks through three key expectations. The first expectation is that teachers exchange information via interaction by asking for assistance or working together. Second, teachers are not viewed as individuals but rather “interdependent because they are embedded in a social structure” (p.10). This social structure can impact capacity at multiple levels such as grade level teams, departments, schools, and districts. Degenne and Forse claim that a change with one teacher at one level can impact multiple levels. Third, in schools, teachers may improve from the assets that exist in a school’s social network. Improvement is more likely when those teachers have access to these existing assets through their social relationships vs. seeking the resources independently. A social network research study could be used to help educational leaders understand “distributed leadership, professional learning communities,

teacher collaboration, reform implementation, and teacher induction” (Moolenaar, 2012, p. 10). In order to prepare professional development opportunities for teachers, a social network perspective considers the interactions of individuals. In relation to a social network perspective, the principles of distributive leadership may also contribute to understanding how teacher interactions impact the learning that occurs in professional development.

2.3 DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Distributive Leadership is not defined as a management method but a perspective where the principal and teachers build foundations of information, talents, and understandings (Vernon-Dotson, et al., 2009). “Evidence of school leadership is not determined by what the school leader does but rather through the “interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 10). The three elements of leaders, followers, and their situation are illustrated by Spillane et al. (2004) as a fluid, reciprocal process that is situational and dependent upon the context (see Appendix E: Elements of Leadership Practice). Distributive leadership creates an environment where “leadership is distributed among all members of the leadership team and where teachers can participate in school decision making” (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia, 2014, p. 205). “The real work of leadership usually involves giving the work back to the people who must adapt, and mobilizing them to do so” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, p. 35). Mobilizing teachers can occur via various styles depending upon the experience level of that specific teacher. Leaders may alter their style depending upon the readiness level of the learner. Teachers with less experience may require a more rigid approach while adults more experienced can benefit from a supportive, but less controlling, approach (Hersey and Blanchard, 1981).

These varying styles are endorsed by Spillane (2006) by stating distributive leadership is “not a prescription for how to practice school leadership...but offers a framework for thinking about leadership differently” (p.26).

The Distributive Leadership perspective provides principles to transform a school culture without adhering to specific criteria. Distributive leadership does not specify a singular leadership style, but rather provides a lens to view the “activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks” (Spillane et al., 2004, p.5).

2.3.1 Building Capacity

As spending time on instructional activities and implementing best practice strategies may be the goal of the building principal, it is unfortunately not always the reality. Building distributive leadership amongst teachers can increase attention to instructional activities in a school (Camburn et al., 2003). The need to build capacity is demonstrated by the current amount of time principals spend on instructional tasks within a school day. According to a study, less time is spent on instructional activities by principals than any other category (Hornig, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). The categories were administrative, organization management, day to day instruction, instructional program, internal relations, and external relations. Results of the study showed that thirty percent of the principal’s day was spent on administrative tasks. Slightly more than twenty percent of the time was spent on organization management. The least amount of time was spent on instructional activities with time in the classroom totaling at less than three percent. Correnti & Rowan, (2007) showed how students who performed the lowest based upon state standardized tests had school administrators who spent the majority of their time on administrative tasks. “Instructional leadership is in short supply in most schools, largely because the typical

principal's working day is consumed by managerial tasks having little or no direct bearing on the improvement of curriculum and instruction" (Camburn et al., 2003, p. 347). Principals spending time in administration tasks within organization management classifications showed the most significant impact on student performance (Correnti & Rowan, 2007).

School leadership extends beyond the role of the principal and includes the actions of numerous teachers in a school. Distributive leadership focuses on identifying and utilizing skills of school employees, regardless of title or tenure (Harris, 2004). Spillane et al., (2004) examine how leadership tasks are distributed across formal leaders, teachers, and followers. Numerous leaders are required for distributive leadership as they "work together, each bringing somewhat different resources-skills, knowledge, and perspectives to bear" (p. 18). Spillane et al. (2004) designed a model to describe the activity between leaders, followers, and the situation. They examine that the activity described comes as a result of the collaborations of these three constructs when carrying out specific leadership tasks. "Leadership involves mobilizing school personnel and clients to notice, face, and take on the tasks of changing instruction as well as harnessing and mobilizing the resources needed to support the transformation of teaching and learning" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 12).

Evaluating how leadership occurs in action amongst specific groups as opposed to focusing on the principal can add to a school's distributive leadership foundation. Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) identify a gap existing with distributive leadership research. The gap points out how past research defines what is needed for academic improvements but neglects how these improvements are carried out by school leaders. Heck and Hallinger (1999) add to the reasoning behind this gap by illustrating the study of leadership and improvements made in a school often center on principals. Associating the title of principal as the only leader has created

a gap because researchers have neglected other causes of leadership in a school. Spillane et al. (2004) implemented a conceptual framework to account the *how* part of leadership that occurs in schools. Instead of viewing leadership as the result of one individual's talents, they look at the overall "practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation" (p.11). To understand leadership one should look beyond the titles and characteristics of individuals and more towards the actual implementation of leadership jobs amongst leaders, followers, and the situation (Spillane et al., 2004). "The distributed leadership perspective is a tool that can enable change in leadership activity" (p.5).

2.3.2 Principal's role

Even though distributive leadership extends beyond school administration to classroom teachers, the principal still serves a specific role while teachers take on specific tasks that accentuate their skillsets. Principals establish common norms and make the most of their teachers' talents (Harris, 2004). Harris classifies the principals that implement distributive leadership as transformational leaders "who built self-esteem, professional competence and gave their staff the confidence and responsibility to lead development and innovation" (p. 17). Learning as adults is "adding to what we know" but transformational learning "changes how we know it" (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16).

In order to recognize and avoid barriers to teacher learning, a principal should understand the difference between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Heifetz, R. & Linsky, M. (2004) described technical challenges as problems that can be resolved by "experts or senior authorities" (p.35). In contrast, adaptive challenges are what actually require leadership since they deal with people, not technical answers (Heifetz, R., & Grashow, A., Linsky, M., 2009). Regardless of the potential barriers that may arise, a key component of political strategy to

employ when demonstrating adaptive leadership is to avoid attempting it alone (Heifetz et al., 2004).

Heifetz et al. (2009) discuss the need to mobilize the system in practicing adaptive leadership. Adaptive challenges can only be overcome when people change their “priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties (p. 19).” Adaptive challenges are more cultural whereas technical challenges are managerial. This same research suggests that interventions, while not always popular, are intended to help the overall organization. Specific qualities of interventions when solving an adaptive challenge are present when success takes place: long term solutions vs. quick fixes, using discomfort to drive progress, and leveraging unusual networks of relationships. Once people identify the elements of the adaptive challenge they validate the need to learn new strategies, moving away from avoiding conflict and towards solving the conflict.

Finally, teachers become more dedicated when their principal encourages their involvement with school decisions and new experiences (Devos et al., 2014). “A supportive school culture that is developed and maintained by the formal leaders is essential for fostering teacher learning opportunities” (Spillane & Hopkins, 2014, p. 328). Through a constructivist approach, Mezirow (1996) explains that “knowledge is not out there to be discovered but is created from interpretations and reinterpretations in light of new experiences” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16). These experiences, interpretations, and reinterpretations are created during professional development writing sessions that teacher leaders design and facilitate.

2.3.3 Improving teachers’ writing abilities

This review of the literature examines what we know as a field for professional learning while developing teachers’ writing abilities. Specifically, the research was used to gain an

understanding of the emerging leaders, their actions, and the principles that frame effective professional development. As early as 1970, studies about professional learning suggest that teachers' should write with their students (Emig, 1971; Whitney, Fredricksen, Hicks, Yagelski & Zuidema, 2014). Professional learning that includes teacher and students, combined with instructional leadership, contributes to school progress. "Leadership is the activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p.11). Three hypotheses exist for this research. First, teachers cannot instruct their students to become proficient writers until they themselves learn how to write proficiently (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Next, teachers will become proficient writers and teachers of writing only if they are part of the actual process instead of delivering instruction from a prescriptive, programmatic approach (Zellermayer, 1990; Cutler & Graham, 2008). Simply providing teachers with explicit lesson plans does not meet the requirement when it comes to preparing and developing effective teachers (Clark & Peterson, 1984). Lastly, building capacity across the school through distributive leadership principles is one approach to influence progressive change and transform a school system (Harris, 2008; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Starting in the 2014 school year, the professional development of Heritage Elementary School teachers in grades 3-5 focused on writing. Teachers participated in professional development writing classes that modeled the same writing process their students are expected to demonstrate. Once teachers' writing skills were developed (Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2001; Stein & Wang, 1988), their efficacy to teach writing to students may improve (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Individuals who desire to teach writing have a willingness to attempt new instructional strategies, adapt to all student needs, and employ effective pedagogical

techniques (Graham et al., 2001; Stein & Wang, 1988). Another reason for this professional development focus is the lack of writing training teachers possess when they become certificated. Formal training is not a common component of any undergraduate education program (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kiuahara et al., 2009). “Teacher education programs must do a better job preparing certification candidates to teach writing” (Gilbert & Graham, 2010, p. 511). The aforementioned philosophy and methods are irrelevant unless teachers’ confidence is first developed through a collaborative, risk free environment that fosters capacity building (Harris, 2008; Knowles, 1955; Mezirow, 2003). Successful teaching and integration of instructional improvement strategies may depend upon a “school leader’s subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, coupled with their beliefs about teacher learning and change” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p.15). The coalition and alliance of the transformation of Heritage Elementary’s adult learning in the discipline of writing was formed in this risk-free setting. Participants were voluntary and self-propelled in the process of change. The change agents met weekly to not only plan together, but also schedule weekly group lessons in which students and teachers participated in modeled writing lessons. This committee developed and adhered to a planned course outline in writing.

2.3.4 Rationale for teaching teachers to write

Teachers have limited learning experiences writing proficiently to narrative, opinion, and informational genres (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kiuahara et al., 2009; Salahu-Din & Miller, 2008). The lack of acknowledgement of teacher needs consequently yielded an all-time low of student writing scores. The 2013-14 PSSA’s reveal only 67% of Heritage Elementary School students performing proficient, compounding the data with no

advanced writers to report. If state achievement scores were to increase, building administration would need to examine past practice and decide where to make changes moving forward. The concrete evolution of a collaborative writing action plan in conjunction with local administrative support was a start in the direction towards change. Situated in distributive leadership, this review of the literature examines the identification of leaders in professional development, actions of those leaders, and the perception of those leaders. A distributive leadership style can “develop and sustain the type of leadership that delivers improved learning for students on outcomes that are valued by them and their communities” (Robinson, 2008, p. 253). Through collaborative redistribution of teacher leaders, this balance affords building administration a chair among, not outside or ahead of his or her staff in the planning and launching of cultural metamorphosis. The rebalance of implementing this new writing initiative centered on student and teacher growth and aided in the cognizance of potential burnout from the principal doing too much. Whitaker (1996) identifies some of the major causes of frustration when it comes to principal burnout including: “site based management, shared decision making, declining resources, increased paperwork and greater expectations from the public and central administration for higher student standards.” Principals face the challenge to act as lead learners and manage while trying to integrate important initiatives at the same time (Whitaker, 1996). Because of this need, distributive leadership principles are employed to develop other key staff members to lead the development of their grade level colleagues (Harris, 2008; Spillane et al., 2001, 2004). The review of literature focused on Professional Development and Distributive Leadership in the cultivation of a specific case in learning and teacher maturation.

2.4 SUMMARY

Principals who grow capacity in the school help to foster long term development of the professional teaching staff. However, remnants of past practice and mandates continue to meander about in our classrooms. These remnants in the domain of writing are inadequately trained teachers and less than proficient students. The evidence suggests that teachers are not adequately prepared to teach writing, yet continue to teach while attempting to effectively grow proficient and advanced writers within their classrooms. Because of the evidence, this approach to professional development was grounded in the theory that the teachers who write proficiently are more likely to possess the skills to teach students to write proficiently (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Prior research has shown that teachers have limited skills for writing proficiently in narrative, opinion, and informational genres (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Salahu-Din & Miller, 2008; Kiuahara et al., 2009; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). In order for growth to occur, teachers must start teaching writing and stop assigning writing.

In terms of local growth, remedy exists in instructional expertise and content expertise. By redefining the hierarchical liberties, roles, and responsibilities amongst and within a school staff community, the promises of growth and change will occur as a result of using the principles of distributive leadership. Energy spent generating a community of adult learners capable of growing not only their practice, but fostering the growth of their colleagues practice may be attained through a distributive leadership approach to professional development.

To encourage teachers, instructional leaders must continue to grow efficacy, energy and purpose. Without these factors present capacity will not develop and the cyclical pattern of untrained teachers of writing will continue to produce unprepared students. State standards now provide educators with a voice for quality writing instruction; however, it does not end there.

Professional development must acknowledge the need for growth and development of their writing skills; hence, the philosophy, the best teachers of writing are teachers who themselves are able to write.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 APPROACH

An evaluative approach was used to assess how the principles of distributive leadership and the principles which underlie professional development informed the use of teacher led writing labs as a means of improving student writing. Evaluation should accurately reveal a program so it can be studied further in order that leadership can continuously improve the initiative. The basic role of evaluation is when one looks for and gathers significant, applicable evidence about both the development and the product of the program. Evaluation is an inquiry process implemented to gather useful information. It helps educators and administrators better understand something in order to make informed decisions about school programs and/or processes (Hannum, Martineau, & Reinelt 2006; Tananis, 2014).

The investigator examined how three principles identified in the research literature influenced teachers to become leaders while improving their writing. Specifically, the investigator examined how professional development writing labs support the development of leadership in a school's effort to improve writing. A distributive leadership perspective helps to distinguish this study of leadership because it takes into consideration the "interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation" (Spillane, 2006, p. 89) and places the practice of leadership before the position or title of any individual. This perspective lets any staff member, regardless of

positionality or rank, serve in a leadership role, depending upon the context of the situation. The professional development writing labs evaluated in this study were designed to help teachers improve their writing abilities. During these labs, teacher leaders could emerge as they collaborated and learned from each other in the school setting.

The rationale this study paired professional development writing labs and distributive leadership. First, there was a clear need to provide writing instruction and experiences for teachers. In an analysis of existing empirical research on professional development, Desimone (2011) found interactive, collective participation within a learning community is a significant factor towards teacher knowledge and pedagogy. Participation in this study was intended to address a void teachers may have experienced due to the limited opportunities during their undergraduate and graduate pedagogical writing coursework (Gilbert & Graham, 2010).

Second, there was a need to establish a self-sustaining, collaborative professional development leadership model to foster growth and develop leaders while building capacity. This research follows prior studies that showed the positive impact effective leadership has on student achievement (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Harris, 2008; Nir & Hameiri, 2014). This is important because it may suggest that teachers who effectively lead the teaching of writing are also proficient writers. In other words, a teacher should develop confidence in their ability to write before they can emerge as a leader in the teaching of writing. Since any educator can serve in any role, the school principal and classroom teachers were all key participants in the professional development writing sessions through intention or as a result of the situation (Spillane, 2006). Since the interactive, collaborative context of writing labs determined the choice of distributed leadership in this study, the primary investigator focused on the learning among teachers and their principal. As a result of the collaborative learning environment, writing

skills were learned and implemented in a planned cycle that focused on the process versus the product.

The investigator facilitated a Planned Course Outline schedule that defined the dates of the teacher writing labs and the specific lessons to be taught at those labs (see Appendix B: Gantt Chart Timeline for 2016-17 Inquiry). During the previous school year, attendance at the lab was voluntary. Even though the majority of teachers attended the voluntary labs, a specific intervention this school year required attendance from all third, fourth and fifth grade teachers as a part of Heritage Elementary's regular professional development cycle. Despite using the word "mandatory", teachers that attended in prior years may have become accustomed to the professional development writing labs. In addition to the schedule, a timeline was designed that specified the due dates for student writing pieces throughout the school year. During the instructional time for these student writings, the primary investigator conducted classroom walkthroughs and weekly check-ins at the building's Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. The primary investigator observed teachers via walkthroughs once per week, although that data was not used for this evaluation research study. The purpose of the walkthroughs was to support expectations established in the writing lab sessions. In addition to the weekly walkthrough, the primary investigator also attended PLC meetings during the second marking period. Once again, the purpose of the primary investigator's attendance was to facilitate and support any questioning and discourse that surrounds a teacher's writing instruction. In addition to the walkthrough observations and PLC meetings, the primary investigator attended writing lab sessions scheduled in the planned course outline, although the reading specialist conducted the instruction. The role of the primary investigator was to welcome participants, maintain the groups' purpose and focus on continuous improvement. During the lab the primary investigator

wrote, collaborated, and shared alongside teachers. Following the lab, the primary investigator conducted a survey, an observation, and a focus group with a volunteer, nonprobability sampling of third, fourth and fifth grade teachers.

3.1.1 Distributive leadership principles

Using a survey, observation and focus group the primary investigator examined three specific distributed leadership principles throughout the professional development writing labs. The principles were: practice, interaction, and attention to design. Even though implementation of the principles occurred simultaneously among administration and teachers in this study, limited information exists about how leadership practice is shared when principals and teachers work alongside each other in job embedded professional development (Spillane, 2008). This study searched for evidence surrounding the three specific distributive leadership design principles. These design principles employed for this study served as the “the unit of interest and attend to both teachers as leaders and administrators as leaders simultaneously” (Spillane, 2008, p. 21). This system of principle classification is useful for this study because it allows the primary investigator to investigate all the educators participating in the professional development writing lab with a heuristic lens.

3.1.1.1 Practice

Practice was defined for this study as the interaction of leaders, followers, and the situation. Practice occurred through the observation of roles assumed, processes employed and structures in place during the writing labs. The primary investigator examined roles such as emergent leaders along with the potential reasons why certain teachers are sought out for advice in writing

by other teachers. This principle developed as the examination progressed with each writing lab. Practice became more evident and was further validated with each data collection. This evidence could be a result of the depth of questioning during the focus group.

3.1.1.2 Interaction

Interaction in this study was defined as the context where leadership developed through collaborations across leaders and followers. Leaders and followers were not determined by position or title but rather the role assumed during a specific situation. The situations during the professional development writing labs allowed for educators and administrators to sit alongside each other and experience the same learning opportunities that their students experience. Those opportunities included writing, collaboration, and reflection. Regarding writing, adult learners in the writing lab did the same work their students were asked to complete. The adult learners also collaborated and reflected on their writing work. It is during this interaction that leaders and followers could emerge.

3.1.1.3 Attention to the design

Attention to the design and structure of each professional development writing lab contributed to the practice and interactions demonstrated by adult participants. Reformat of the writing labs such as procedures and materials were modified as specific needs were identified. These format changes fostered informed decisions and modifications based upon prior professional development writing labs. Previous studies have revealed that extraordinary group success does not happen by chance; that is extraordinary group success is attained through “careful planning, design and discipline” (Collins and Hansen, 2011). In addition, this principle was investigated

not only during the professional development writing labs but also in contexts that occurred outside of the writing labs such as professional learning community meetings.

3.2 METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In regard to the details of the setting, this study was conducted at Heritage Elementary School in the Franklin Regional School District in Murrysville, Pennsylvania. The Franklin Regional School District serves the communities of Export, Murrysville and portions of Delmont. It is located approximately twenty miles East of Pittsburgh. With over 3,600 students and nearly 400 staff members, the district operates three Elementary schools (Heritage, Newlonsburg, and Sloan), a Middle School, and a Senior High School. Heritage Elementary School is the largest of the three elementary buildings, enrolling just under 650 students in grades K-5. In addition, Heritage elementary is the district's only Title 1 School, with approximately 20% of the population economically disadvantaged, more than twice the amount of any other elementary school in the district.

An evaluation approach was used to gain an understanding of the leaders, their actions, and the perceptions that surrounded this professional development writing lab. An evaluation approach shaped this research and the methods were a survey, observation, and focus group (see Appendix C: Writing Research Survey & Appendix D: Focus Group Questions). The basic characteristics of qualitative studies provide the rationale for using this methodology. According to Merriam (2009), there are several definitive characteristics of qualitative studies that indicate the approach to be a valid one. Marshall & Rossman (1999) state that in qualitative research it is important to understand the theoretical framework of the study and that in order to support study

validity and reliability the researcher should utilize the strategy of triangulation looking for reliability across different types of data.

3.2.1 Survey

To begin this selection process, 15 teachers were asked to participate in the survey (see Appendix C: Writing Research Survey). Criteria for initial selection required teachers were employed full time at Heritage Elementary School, were teaching in grade three, four or five, and had participated in at least one professional development writing lab. This was an anonymous survey, and responses were not be identifiable in any way. All responses are confidential, and results were kept under lock and key. Participation was voluntary, and a teacher could stop at any time during the survey. There were no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor were there any direct benefits to the participants. It was stated that they would not receive any payment for participation.

Prior to commencing this study, a meeting was held with 15 teachers. The primary investigator informed the teachers that the investigator's decision to focus on professional development writing labs was due to Heritage Elementary's state test results and an overall lack of focused professional development programs. Two years ago the school data proved that only 67% of students were proficient writers. In addition, professional development writing courses lacked focus, follow up, and teacher satisfaction based upon evaluations. Following this meeting, a survey was sent to the 15 teachers from Heritage Elementary that worked in grades 3, 4, 5, and reading support. Specifically, there were five 3rd grade teachers, four 4th grade teachers, five 5th grade teachers, and one reading support teacher. The reason for starting with a survey in this mixed methods approach was twofold. First, the data collected from this survey enabled the

primary investigator to identify potential emergent leaders from the entire group. The survey (Appendix C) asked who they go to for advice on teaching writing in the classroom. In order to identify emergent leaders, the participants were asked to select from the list of 15 teachers, none, one, or more than one, when it came to who they went to for advice when it came to writing instruction. The more votes a teacher received for being an individual that others went to for advice, the more likely they were identified as an emerging leader in this phase of the study.

3.2.2 Observation

An observation approach was used to record the behaviors demonstrated by the teachers during the writing lab. The 15 teachers observed in the writing lab were the same teachers that had been invited to participate in the survey. During the observation, the primary investigator looked for specific behaviors that would represent evidence of emerging leadership. Specific examples of the evidence include: practice & interaction, both which are defined under the principles of distributive leadership.

3.2.3 Focus Group

Following the survey and observations, four teachers participated in a focus group. The participants in this focus group were selected from the original cohort of teachers. Specifically, these four teachers received the most nominations from other teachers in the survey and demonstrated observable evidence of distributive leadership during the writing lab. They were selected on the basis of nonprobability, purposeful sampling. A systematic literature review of qualitative studies suggests that nonprobability sampling is the preferred method for the majority

of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Nonprobability sampling is used to “solve qualitative problems such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationship linking occurrences” (Honigmann, 1982, p. 84). The most common form of nonprobability sampling is purposeful sampling (Chein, 1981). A significant aspect of purposeful sampling is that it is based on the theory that “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Patton, 2002, p. 77). The advantage of purposeful sampling was that the primary investigator selected the most suitable subjects for the focus group based on the survey data and their prior writing lab experiences. This sampling was particularly useful in studying a small focus group of four teachers. Another advantage of purposeful sampling a focus group of four teachers was that it allowed the identification of patterns and underlying motives to emerge. The type of purposeful sampling used in this study was a typical sample, which “reflects the average person” and is “not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual (Patton, 2002, p. 236). The four teachers selected for the focus group met the criteria described by Patton (2002). “Focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives but don’t” (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, Macnaghten & Myers, 2004, p.65). Through meeting with the teachers, the primary investigator may understand the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations (Merriam, 2009).

The three research questions for this approach were: Who are the leaders in this professional development effort? What are these leaders doing? How do these emerging leaders view this approach to professional development as something different than the usual approach to PD? The survey and observation served as methods of approach to identify the focus group participants in this research study. A focus group was the final method used to collect the data to

address this research because of the potential to collect richer responses with more detail. The focus group served as the preliminary identifier for more specific issues that could be expanded upon in a future survey or phenomenological interview with a larger study sample.

The instruments used for data analysis for triangulation in this particular study consisted of a survey, an observation, and a focus group. The investigator chose to apply the concept of triangulation with the three instruments in order to examine reliability. Marshall & Rossman (1999) state that in qualitative research it is important to understand the theoretical framework of the study and in order to support validity and reliability the researcher should utilize the strategy of triangulation.

A specific reason for selecting a focus group was that a focus group allowed the investigator to gather a group of teachers with a common interest and similar job embedded professional development experiences in writing. The investigator gathered data through teachers' responses. Some advantages of this method are that focus groups create a climate or dynamic, can cause teachers to consider other perspectives, and allow individuals to reach agreement. Another advantage of focus group is a deeper level of understanding may be gained. This can be accomplished by following up on responses with clarifying questions. Focus groups also allow the teachers to build from each other's responses and collaborate on similar experiences through dialogue. Some disadvantages of this approach lie in the idea that members of the group may withhold information or be intimidated to speak up in the presence of an authority, a more dominant personality, their colleagues, and change or alter their perception based upon other participants' responses. To mitigate this potential negative influence of authority, the principal can remain unbiased, abstain from acknowledgement, approving, disapproving, complimenting or disparaging any response made. Similarly, two or more

individuals may dominate the conversation, thereby influencing the participation of others (Seale *et. al.*, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Menter *et. al.*, 2011). It is the role of the investigator to stop this from occurring by involving all participants in the focus group.

Table 1 Inquiry Questions with Method and Evidence Collection

Questions	Method	Evidence to be collected
1. Who is a leader in this professional development effort?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Names of teachers that other teachers go to (emergent leaders) Reason for going to that teacher (if applicable) Reason for not going to any teachers (if applicable)
2. What are these leaders doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who sat where Who took on leadership roles Who spoke out Evidence based behaviors
3. How do these emerging leaders view this approach to professional development as something different than the usual approach to PD?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discover perceived differences of writing lab vs. other professional development experiences Discover perceived impact how writing lab might affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of writing Writing instruction Interactions with colleagues Interactions with principal Discover how collaboration and interaction with colleagues and principal impacted their classroom writing instruction Perceptions and attitudes about writing alongside colleagues and sharing those writings Perceptions and attitudes about why their colleagues view them as leaders in the teaching of writing

Questions during the focus group centered on collaboration, inquiry, experiences, and growth. Specifically, teachers shared their perceptions of differences regarding how the writing labs differed from previous professional development they have experienced. While the focus

was narrowed, data collected provided specific insights and productive interactions (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, Lowden, 2011). The goal of the focus group is that the participants share their experiences and perceptions of those experiences as a result of participating in the writing labs. The conversation was guided so that teachers could elaborate on the specific experiences and actions that reflected distributive leadership principles. Discussion occurred on the professional development writing labs and how this context enhanced inquiry and collaboration opportunities as well as the overall change in practice as a result of the professional development (see Appendix C: Writing Research Survey).

The focus group was recorded using a recording device and a text to speech Google software program (see Appendix D: Focus Group Questions). The audio device recording was compared to the text to speech software. Recording teacher's experiences based upon their own perspective provides a method to identify distributive leadership principles. This approach provided an understanding of the specific factors that impacted professional development writing labs (Menter *et. al.*, 2011).

3.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The investigator used quantitative analysis through a frequency distribution to report the survey results. The survey results were used to determine what teachers to include in the focus group. Survey results were also used to determine correlation with lab observations.

The investigator also observed the fifteen staff members in a professional development writing lab. Observational evidence was used to determine what teachers to include in the focus group. Like the previous method, the observational evidence was used to identify correlation

with survey. Evidence observed included seating location, leadership roles assumed, and staff engagement.

The investigator collected focus group data from third, fourth and fifth grade teachers and coded the evidence; abstracting why these four emerging leaders perceived this writing lab approach different than other professional development experiences. Teacher 3, 4, 5, and 6 were chosen as leaders in the professional development writing effort based upon survey and observation results. Responses were coded to discover themes and identify correlation with the writing lab. Coded data included the interaction and collaboration amongst teachers that extended outside the lab and influenced writing instruction. Data were triangulated for reliability. One area of attention in the focus group was the follow up question(s) that support the responses. Depending upon the responses, the primary investigator maintained an “if-then” scenario in order to foster deeper conversations. While the goal was to foster the conversations, the primary investigator also wanted to keep the focus group free to allow themes to emerge naturally.

To protect the privacy of focus group members, all transcripts were coded with pseudonyms and participants were asked not to share what was discussed in the focus group with anyone else. The focus group lasted about one hour and was audio taped to make sure that it is recorded accurately. Reasonable efforts were made to keep the personal information in this research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study remained confidential. Participant names were not used in any written reports or publications that resulted from this research. Audio remained secured with the researcher, was transcribed and then destroyed to eliminate audible identification of subjects.

This evaluation was implemented at the beginning of the second marking period to coincide with a professional development writing lab. Through the lens of distributive leadership

principles, the primary investigator collected data during a focus group to determine the perceptions and attitudes of teacher leaders about professional learning. The primary investigator conducted a focus group to determine whether or not the principles of distributive leadership supported teachers' improvement in practice. The data received through the focus group is intended to support the implementation and refinement of the professional development writing lab. The specific refinements are identified in the focus group questions. The purpose of collecting this data was to refine the professional development strategies employed and support pedagogical improvement. This method of practitioner research was focused on a characteristic of development or transformation at Heritage Elementary School. The investigator facilitated the intervention and determined its influence in order to improve upcoming writing labs. (Menter, et. al., 2011; McEwan & McEwan, 2003). As writing represents the instructional content in the study, the collection of data illustrates the fundamental elements necessary in developing a sustainable professional learning community. The growth occurs as a result of what happens in between the professional development sessions (Fullan, 2014). The development of people where they can grow talents, achieve goals, and grow from each other is the product to interpret after this process (2014). As stated before, this evaluation focuses on writing but the distributive leadership principles may have created a foundation for many kinds of Professional Development activities.

Table 2 Inquiry Questions with Method and Analysis/Interpretation

Questions	Method	Analysis & Interpretation
<p>1. Who is a leader in this professional development effort?</p> <p>2. Why do teachers identify some colleagues as a resource for their professional learning?</p>	Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualtrics for survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Survey using Qualtrics of 15 staff members ○ Survey results used to determine what teachers to include in focus group ○ Survey results used to determine correlation with lab observations
<p>3. What did emerging leaders do in the PD sessions?</p> <p>4. How do the emerging leaders describe their leadership action in the focus group?</p>	Observations and Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe writing lab <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Observational evidence ○ Observation results used to determine what teachers to include in focus group ○ Observation results used to determine correlation with survey ○ Who sat where ○ Who took on leadership roles ○ Who spoke out ○ Observable teacher behaviors ○ Shift in attitude and engagement from obligation to responsibility
<p>5. How do these emerging leaders view this approach to professional development as something different than the usual approach to PD?</p>	Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 teachers talk about schools commitment to professional learning ○ Coding teacher responses to discover themes and identify correlation with writing lab ○ Triangulate data for reliability ○ Focus group will be recorded, transcribed, and evaluated ○ Ask questions that focus on who, what, where, and how much

3.3.1 Analysis

An evaluation method was used to research job embedded professional development writing labs in a professional learning community. This method was implemented in order to gather useful information that allowed the investigator to better understand the professional development writing lab in order to make informed decisions about future implementation (Hannum, Martineau, & Reinelt 2006; Tananis, 2014).

The labs were designed to support teachers in their effort to become better writers and better teachers of writing. Evidence was collected to identify the teachers who were emerging as leaders and to recognize the distributed leadership principles that developed during the school's effort to improve writing.

The investigator conducted a survey, an observation, and a focus group to determine whether or not the principles of distributive leadership supported teachers' improvement in practice. This data served two purposes. First, it reinforced the implementation and refinement of the writing lab concepts. Second, the data was used to improve the distributive leadership principles and support continuous improvement (Torres, 2006). This support is important so that the writing pedagogy is sustainable and the school can progress regardless of who assumes the role of leader. Overall, the data collection has less to do with writing as a subject (even though it is the focused subject in this study) and everything to do with building capacity across a strong, empowered and sustainable learning community.

The three research questions for this study are:

1. Who are the leaders in this professional development effort?

2. What are these leaders doing?
3. How do these emerging leaders view this approach to professional development as something different than the usual approach to PD?

The primary investigator used Cresswell's (2007) template and Menter's (2011) procedures for coding qualitative data. Data was collected during the focus group through audio recording and text to speech software. Next the data was prepared for analysis by transcribing the audio recording along with cross referencing the text typed in the software program. Following the transcribing, the primary investigator read through the data to gain an overall understanding of the information. Studying the transcript, the primary investigator used colored highlighters to identify important statements and also made notes in the margin for reliability. Each color represented a thematic area. The consistent areas were divided into segments of information, repeated patterns, and concepts. Next the segments of information were labeled with codes. The codes were reduced to avoid overlap or redundancy and categorized to five themes. These themes described what occurred, what was expected as well as what was not expected during the focus group. Finally the themes were interpreted and validated through triangulation with the survey and observation, looking for reliability across different types of data. In addition, the primary investigator reviewed the transcript an additional time to conclude which data were supported or not supported by the literature (Roberts, 2010).

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 SURVEY

Who are the leaders in this professional development effort?

Why do teachers identify some colleagues as a resource for their professional learning?

To identify emerging leaders, a survey was administered to fifteen teachers to identify which colleague(s) they sought out for advice about the teaching of writing. The overall response to the survey was positive with 86% participation. Of the fifteen teachers who were sent invitations to participate, thirteen completed the survey. The principal was listed as a possible choice for selection in addition to the fifteen teachers; however he did not participate in the survey. The investigator looked to the data to determine if the principal was a person identified as a leader in the professional development. If the data results showed that the principal was sought out more than any of the fifteen teachers, one could infer from the literature that the principles of distributive leadership and capacity building were ineffective in this case (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Harris, 2008; Nir & Hameiri, 2014). Each of the thirteen survey participants selected at least one of the top four teachers listed in Table 3. Table 3 illustrates the breakdown of votes each of the individuals received from their colleagues. The votes were collected from the survey question (see Appendix C: Writing Research Survey):

Select the name(s) of the staff member(s) here at Heritage that you go to for advice about teaching writing. Do not choose your own name.

Table 3 Votes received from colleagues

Staff member sought for advice	Percentage of respondents that selected teacher
Teacher 6	62% (8)
Teacher 3	54% (7)
Teacher 5	54% (7)
Teacher 4	46% (6)
Principal	30% (4)
Teacher 14	23% (3)
Teacher 1	8% (1)
Teacher 2	8% (1)
Teacher 15	8% (1)
Teacher 7	0%
Teacher 8	0%
Teacher 9	0%
Teacher 10	0%
Teacher 11	0%
Teacher 12	0%
Teacher 13	0%

It can be seen from the data in Table 3 that teacher 6 was selected by 62% of the respondents. Teacher 6 was the teacher who led the professional development writing labs. What stands out in the table is the three teachers who did not lead the actual lab were sought after for advice in teaching writing by half (an average of 50%) of their colleagues. Significantly the building principal, selected 38% of the time, was not one of the top four individuals sought for advice. This suggests the emergence of leaders other than the principal or the one individual who facilitated the professional development writing labs.

The follow up question asked in the survey was: *Why did you go to (name of selection)?* The common themes identified in these responses are summarized in Table 4. Entire responses can be located in Appendix F.

Table 4 Why teachers were selected by their colleagues

Theme	Teacher															
	6	3	5	4	14	1	2	15	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Experience	X	X	X	X	X											
Collaboration outside of the writing lab	X	X	X	X												
Overall value provided through ideas and resources	X	X	X	X	X											
Western Pennsylvania Writing Project Fellow	X	X	X													
Other reasons for selection																
Proximity						X	X	X								
Personal friend		X	X													

Themes discovered parallel the principles of distributive leadership and suggest leaders were emerging in the professional development writing labs. For example, collaborative experiences and overall value provided align with the principles of practice and interaction. One participant stated “I go to teacher 5 because he/she has the experience of teaching the writing curriculum in past years. We share ideas and resources about what will work best with the students. I also like to confirm that what I am doing in my classroom is meeting the writing expectations of fifth graders.” What stands out is the one indicator of commitment to professional learning that actually occurred outside of the writing lab. Three out of the four teachers selected by their colleagues were fellows in the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project (see Table 4 and Appendix F). This designation reinforces the teachers’ commitment to improvement and professional development. Not only were teachers selected because of the value, expertise, and collaboration during the writing lab, but also because of their participation in professional development outside of the school setting. However, teacher 11 is also a fellow of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project and did not receive a vote from any other teacher in the survey. This result may be

explained by the fact that even though teacher 11 attended the WPWP in 2014, he/she accepted a new district position, elementary math coach, in 2015. The new position meant that he/she left the classroom to work with teachers on math instruction. Due to budgetary reasons, teacher 11 returned to the classroom after just one year as math coach. Cause for inconsistency behind why the other Western Pennsylvania Writing Project graduates were perceived as leaders and not teacher 11 may be due in part to how teacher 11 was viewed by his/her colleagues: possessing math expertise rather than writing expertise as specified in his/her previous year's assignment.

Finally, a positive correlation was found between the teachers that selected the principal as a leader in the professional development effort and the teachers that were selected as leaders by their colleagues. All four of the teachers, teacher 3, 4, 5, and 6, selected the principal as one of the people that they go to as a leader and resource in the professional development effort. These results are in agreement with (Harris, 2004; Devos et al., 2014) findings which indicated that principals who make use of teachers' talents while encouraging their involvement in decision making can result in overall increased dedication. As teacher 4 said in the survey: "He is a person I can talk to about writing in my classroom. He shares ideas with me. He has also provided me with many resources to use in my classroom." Other reasons stated for going to the principal as a leader and resource included teacher 3 stating: "I went to him to clarify expectations for final products and for guidance when road bumps arise." In addition teacher 4 responded with the phrase: "Educational leader; passion for writing education." Finally, teacher 6 stated that: "He is a knowledgeable resource in leadership. When I plan and implement labs, I look to him to guide me in understanding elements of culture necessary to move forward with my colleagues. He is also my mentor. He observes every lab and gives important feedback that is imperative in planning future labs. He is my most valuable resource when it comes to

collaborators.” The final comment from teacher 6 highlights the collaboration that occurred between the principal and reading specialist. This comment also serves as evidence to support the research which suggests that adults with more experience can benefit from a supportive, but less controlling, approach (Hersey and Blanchard, 1981). Together the results and reasons behind the teachers and principals being chosen provide important insights into understanding the connection between the literature and evidence. At the same time, the survey results also provide insight into further inquiry for future actions. Actions could include research into the leadership perceptions of teachers that are classified as followers under the distributive leadership perspective. Those future actions may seek to answer the question: Why did none of the other teachers choose the principal as a leader they go to in this professional development effort?

4.2 OBSERVATION

What did emerging leaders do in the PD sessions?

The investigator observed teachers during a writing lab. The 15 teachers observed in the writing lab were the same teachers who had been invited to participate in the survey. During the observation, the primary investigator looked for specific behaviors that would represent evidence of teachers emerging as leaders by demonstrating a shift in attitude from obligation to responsibility while engaging in the professional development writing lab. Observational evidence collected in the writing lab was consistent with the distributive leadership principles: practice, interaction, and attention to design. The observable behaviors that correlated with these principles were speaking, sharing, seating choice, and interaction. Table 5 below illustrates the breakdown of the behaviors. Teacher participants are listed in the table 5 but for confidentiality

purposes are protected with pseudonyms. These pseudonyms throughout this research remained consistent.

Table 5 Observable evidence during writing lab

Observable Evidence	Teacher														
	6	3	5	4	14	1	2	15	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Stood in front of group	X														
Facilitated the lab	X														
Read exemplar	X														
Called on teachers by name	X														
Asked others to share	X														
Sat in front during writing time		X	X	X						X					
Spoke first during small group		X	X	X											
Spoke to other teachers after the lab to answer questions	X	X	X	X											
Volunteered to share	X	X	X	X	X										
Spoke to entire group	X	X	X	X											
Provided examples from classroom lessons	X	X	X	X					X		X				

For consistency and comparison purposes, teachers in table 5 are listed in the same rank order that resulted from the survey shown in table 3. It can be seen from the data in Table 5 that teacher 6, teacher 5, teacher 4 and teacher 3 voluntarily engaged in discussion throughout the writing lab. What stands out in the table is teacher 6 and the five observable behaviors that are exclusively attributed to him/her during the lab. Teacher 6 is one of the school's reading specialists. More importantly, when it comes to the subject of writing, teacher 6 is an educator who has attended national level PD writing conferences outside of the school district along with presenting multiple PD sessions at other districts. He/She is recognized as a consultant with the National Writing Project and has co-authored a book on writing in schools. Finally, teacher 6 is a consistent presenter on the subject of writing at state intermediate units. While it is apparent that he/she has experiences and expertise in the subject of writing, the principal recognized the importance of distributing this expertise and building capacity among other teachers. Even

though teacher 6 planned and led the professional development, it is evident that other teachers are now demonstrating leadership behaviors as illustrated in table 5. Closer inspection of the table shows teacher 8 was the only person, other than the three identified leaders, who sat in front during the writing time in the lab. The interesting fact behind this observation is that teacher 8 is a first year teacher but her formal mentor is teacher 3. As illustrated throughout this study, teacher 3 was selected as a leader by his/her colleagues and demonstrated observable evidence of leadership. While research suggests that a first year teacher benefits from formal as well as informal mentors, in this instance teacher 3 was modeling behaviors of leadership that were emulated by his/her mentee (Desimone, Hochberg, Porter, Polikoff, Schwartz & Johnson, 2013).

Specific behaviors, congruent with the distributive leadership principles studied in this research, emerged from the observation evidence. All four teachers initiated conversations during the small group sessions. In addition each of them offered specific examples from classroom lessons. After the facilitator (teacher 6) taught the demonstration lesson to the group, teachers 3, 4 and 5 shared their own writing piece. At various times during the writing lab, other teachers, or followers, demonstrated specific behaviors such as note taking, eye contact, and nonverbal acknowledgement. Even though table 5 shows several teachers without observable leadership behaviors, their presence during the PD serves a specific purpose as suggested by the research (Spillane et al. (2004). That purpose occurs within the context where leadership develops through collaboration across leaders and followers. Teachers are sometimes followers and strive for direction from other individuals, supporting the idea of a distributed leadership perspective (see Appendix E: Elements of Leadership Practice). These behaviors were observed by the investigator, however, these behaviors were more subtle such as eye contact with teacher

5, teacher 4, teacher 3 and/or teacher 6; nonverbal agreements via head nods after teacher 5, teacher 4, teacher 3 and/or teacher 6 spoke; and finally notetaking during or after teacher 5, teacher 4, teacher 3 and/or teacher 6 spoke. Even though these other behaviors mentioned were observable, the primary investigator did not correlate the evidence with any principles of distributive leadership.

The observation evidence is consistent with the previous data collected in the survey. The same four teachers identified as emerging leaders in the survey demonstrated evidence of leadership during the observation. Evidence listed in tables 4 and 5 identifies four teachers who were selected as leaders by their colleagues. In addition, the evidence also shows the observable behaviors of the four selected leaders during their attendance at the professional development writing lab. Tables 4 and 5 illustrate that the same four teachers identified as leaders by their colleagues in the survey also demonstrate observable leadership behaviors during the professional development.

4.3 FOCUS GROUP

Is there evidence to support this notion that teachers did not feel like writers or as competent writers or lacking confidence in writing?

Two years ago there was a low capacity to teach writing due in part to teachers not feeling like writers and lacking confidence in writing. Evidence from the focus group supported the notion that initially teachers did not feel like writers and lacked confidence in writing. Teacher 3 expressed his/her early struggle but went on to explain how that struggle was later minimized when he/she stated: “When we were asked to try something brand new. Like when

the literary essay was brand new to me two years ago. I was like ‘What?’ I haven’t done this since high school and I don’t know if I was even good at it then. What are we doing and how do I make this appropriate for 3rd grade? But the principal walking through the struggle with us was really nice.”

In regards to teacher 5’s initial feeling about writing, he/she stated: “It was intimidating at first, I don’t know if I’m that good of a writer but I see that that’s probably what my students feel. (Teacher 3 agreeing) To show them (students) how to overcome that apprehension and to show them that we all have different abilities had been helpful.” Additionally, teacher 3 talked about how he/she has used his/her lack of confidence as a teaching tool in the classroom when it came to sharing writing aloud in front of others. He/she stated: “What we did in learning to share (writings) in our morning meetings has really carried over. That might be the biggest thing that I felt carried over into our writing class with the students. ‘Oh, mistakes are how you write.’ It doesn’t come out alright the first time you write, or rarely does it come out right.”

Teacher 5 supported the idea that the teacher leaders did not initially feel like writers and lacked confidence in writing when he/she talked about writing in front of his/her students: “until I started to write on anchor charts, I was like ‘oh wow’, this makes such a difference. They (students) see my struggles.”

Finally, earlier evidence that revealed the teacher leaders’ initial lack of confidence in writing now helped them recognize those same uncertainties with two first year teachers in the school. Teacher 3 explained when he/she said: “we have two brand new colleagues this year. One is totally new to the grade level and one is new to our district. I think it has been neat to see where I struggled two years ago but now I feel more confident and I’m able to share what my roadblocks were along the way.”

Teacher 3 went on to explain that he or she would empathize with the new teachers feelings of frustration during a writing lab when he/she said: “I think it's hard because when we are sitting with grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers in our writing lab and for that first year colleague who is new to the writers workshop process to volunteer and say: ‘Hey can we hash this out?’ But, because the conversation started on a Friday morning writing lab we can then go back to our PLC and say: ‘Hey, I’m confused about this, I’m stuck on this’, and kind of wade through it together. ‘I’m stuck, I’m struggling with this.’ To be able to share and say, this is where my hurdles were. Yep, I have been in the exact same spot and here is what I tried. It made me realize how much I have learned that is now just always in my back pocket and ready. But it was a struggle at first to get to where you can openly and honestly say: ‘this is where I am struggling’.” Sometimes my answer is: ‘I’m confused about that too. I’m going to check with one of my colleagues.’ That honesty of being able to say, ok, I was taking notes at the meeting and I am still wondering about this is really helpful. They (new teachers) are just coming into the common language that I now feel comfortable with after two or three years. I think that open conversation really helps and leads to authentic talk. We will get together as a grade level and they (new teachers) will say: ‘ok, I didn’t understand what Teacher 6 was saying in the Friday morning writing lab’ but because it’s the third year for many of us but brand new for others we are able to relate to their feelings of uncertainty when it comes to writing.

Evidence from the focus group supported the notion that initially teachers did not feel like writers and lacked confidence in writing. In saying that, these same teachers are now identified by their colleagues as leaders and were now referring back to their initial feelings of uncertainty to help support new teachers through this professional development writing approach.

As a result of participation in a lab-based professional development writing curriculum, did evidence emerge to support the three principles of distributive leadership: practice, interaction, and attention to design?

The four teachers invited to participate in the focus group were selected as a result of the survey and observation data. The data showed that these four teachers were leaders in this professional development effort. Specifically, the data indicated these four teachers were identified by their colleagues as resources for teaching writing. In addition, the data revealed observable evidence that suggested these four teachers took on leadership roles during the professional development writing lab. During the focus group (see Appendix D: Focus Group Questions), the primary investigator listened for specific themes that paralleled the principles of distributive leadership (practice, interaction, and attention to design) while at the same time revealed evidence of teachers talking about the schools commitment to professional learning. Four broad themes emerged from the analysis. The themes identified in the following sections describe what occurred, what was expected, as well as what was not expected during the focus group.

4.3.1 Theme 1

Led by teachers: Establishing trust and collegial relationships

The first question was: How was this writing lab experience different than previous professional development experiences in which you have participated? This question aimed to discover perceived differences of the writing lab compared to prior professional development experiences. Throughout the teacher responses to this first question, evidence of the distributive

leadership principle, attention to design, emerged repeatedly. Attention to design in this study was defined as the structure of each professional development writing lab and how those structures contributed to the practice and interactions demonstrated by adult participants. Reformat of the writing labs such as procedures and materials were modified as specific needs were identified. These format changes fostered informed decisions and modifications based upon prior professional development writing labs.

When asked about the uniqueness of the lab, the teachers were unanimous in the view that a teacher led design was empowering. As teacher 4 put it: “What I love about it is that it’s teacher-led; since it’s our colleague, and it’s somebody that we can look to for guidance and support, and it isn’t something that’s a top-down thing. When a colleague is empowered to be that leader I think we all receive it better somehow because it’s on our level we understand that we are all in this together and it’s something that I think empowers all of us to then help our students to be better writers.” Another focus group participant, teacher 3, referred to the same notion of empowerment when she said: “I wish we had more colleague-led in services...it’s somebody doing what you’re doing everyday...knows your kids, knows the culture of the building.”

A change that was incorporated to improve the principle of design included calling on teachers during the lab who were able to provide examples from their instruction. When the writing labs began, teacher participation, other than teacher 6 (or the principal) were minimal. After a few months, teachers were asked prior to the lab by the principal and/or teacher 6 if they would share some of their writing experiences from their classroom instruction. The data suggests that the teachers who emerged from the survey as leaders were the same individuals the principal and/or teacher 6 spoke to about sharing when the writing labs were just starting. After a few labs, including those held this year; these same teachers now were volunteering to share

without being asked. As evidenced in the observation, the change in culture which resulted in increased sharing confirmed the findings of Harris (2003) that suggests teachers will focus on pedagogy and help their colleagues advance their own instruction. Although these undertakings are relatively atypical, they are not assigned through an administrative directive. Rather, they occur by inspiring those with no formal obligation to assume them. These adjustments suggest changes to the design of the lab in addition to the colleague led structure which revealed evidence of distributive leadership.

4.3.2 Theme 2

Collaboration: working together through shared challenges

The second question was: You talked a lot about the differences and what those differences were. How have those differences impacted your interactions with your colleagues? Whether that be interactions inside the classrooms or outside the classrooms, specifically about writing? This question sought evidence to determine if teacher interactions were influenced as a result of the professional development writing labs. Throughout the responses to this second question, evidence of the distributive leadership principle, interaction, emerged repeatedly. Interaction in this study was defined as the context where leadership developed through collaboration across leaders and followers. Leaders and followers were not determined by position or title, but rather the role assumed during a specific situation. The specific situations involved adult learners in the writing lab doing the same work their students were asked to complete. During this work, the adult learners collaborated and reflected on their writing. It was during this interaction that leaders and followers were determined.

The second question suggests that interaction was evident and occurring as a result of the professional development writing labs. Not only were teachers engaging in conversations during the actual writing labs to discuss pedagogy, but they also interacted consistently outside of the labs regarding lesson preparation and effectiveness. Outside interactions occurred during PLC meetings, classrooms, and elsewhere in the school. During their PLC meetings the conversations were continuations of the discussions from the labs. Teachers discussed the elements of writing within specific genres along with ways to foster growth. For example, teacher 4 said: “We have those discussions at PLC meetings about our strengths, weaknesses and where do we need to work harder.” Another teacher followed up on teacher 4’s comment and alluded to the principle of interaction and its benefit when she stated: “those conversations (at PLC meetings) personally put me more at ease knowing that all of us have those students who are struggling.” Adding to the principle of interaction that occurs within a single grade level, teachers discussed the collaboration and articulation that also occurred across grade levels. Specifically, teachers were using the expectations and experiences from the lab to initiate conversations that crossed grade levels. Commenting on this, a teacher remarked “We have lots of conversations even beyond our grade level. We discuss with each other, stop each other to talk in the hallways. We ask: Where are you? How are you doing? How did you get there? What are your ideas? We just build from each other.” teacher 6 commented that teachers “don’t have to reinvent the wheel” as a result of these collaborative conversations. Another important finding that supported this articulation was that teachers were pairing up with other grade levels to collaborate on writing. Because teachers combined different grade levels to collaborate, one teacher noted: “it does affect our relationship with our colleagues” while another teacher followed with the comment: “Absolutely”. The most interesting findings to reinforce the emergence of interaction were comments that summed it up:

“You see the progression year to year....it isn’t just one and done.” It’s not like one grade level...it becomes our kids, our team, our initiative.” “That conversation is alive and is happening all the time.” These comments are in agreement with Lumby’s (2013) findings, indicating that formal leaders who seek improved results must construct the situations where “the entire organization is working interdependently in the collective pursuit of better outcomes”.

The third question was a continuation of the prior question and sought additional evidence to determine if teacher interactions with their principal were influenced as a result of the professional development writing labs. Throughout the responses to this third question, evidence of the distributive leadership principle of practice repeatedly emerged. Practice in this study was defined as the interaction of leaders, followers, and the situation.

The third question was: You just talked about how the differences in professional development may have impacted your interaction with your colleagues. Have the differences from the professional development impacted or changed the way in which you interact with your principal?

This question revealed that practice was evident between teachers and principal as a result of the professional development writing labs. This question elicited responses from teachers that conveyed feelings of trust, understanding and encouragement as a result of the interactions with their principal. Harris (2004) classifies the principals that implement distributive leadership as transformational leaders “who built self-esteem, professional competence and gave their staff the confidence and responsibility to lead development and innovation” (p. 17). Teachers become more dedicated when their principal encourages their involvement with school decisions (Devos et al., 2014). Teacher 5 commented towards the feelings of trust, understanding and encouragement when he/she stated: “You (principal) know

what we've done because you come to the morning meetings with us so whenever you see our papers turned in you've experienced it with them. You can have conversation with them because you did it too. It's not just like the teachers are writing. You're right alongside us writing." Teacher 3 elaborated on teacher 5's remarks when he/she commented: "I think too, it's nice that you (principal) will experience the struggle with us too. When we are asked to try something brand new, like when literary essay was brand new to me two years ago, I was like 'what'? I haven't done this since high school and I don't know if I was even good at it then. What are we doing and how do I make this appropriate for 3rd grade? But because you walked through this with us I think is really nice. We know that your door is always open. So it's nice for us to know that you care, to know that you're involved and to know that that passes along to the students as well." Teacher 6 elaborated by saying: "Just knowing the staff and students that way, coming to the lab, being a part of the lab, writing alongside us. I think that just proves trust and we know that we are all in this together; it is not this uneven thing going on. Finally, teacher 5 summarized the prior comments with: "It's nice to see everybody share because you trust everybody and feel comfortable. And whenever the principal shares, it's just nice to see, oh I can share in front of my principal, and even if it's not a great piece, you're (principal) ok with that. And you're like, you should try it, it's still good."

In addition to these insights, teachers also expressed the impact the principal has on the attitude of the students in his/her classroom. For example, teacher 4 stated "I love the written feedback he (principal) gives my kids, it is like gold." The teacher would ask students, "Should I make copies of what he said?" They respond, "please do." Another teacher also talked about how the presence of the principal makes a positive impact on the students' attitude towards their writings: "They get so excited, they know it matters, they know someone besides their teacher is

going to read those words. They rise to the challenge. To know that the principal is involved and know that passes along to students is nice to know.” These results support the ideas of Harris (2003), who suggested that the ‘so what’ of distributed leadership is the acknowledgment that the main duty of the formal leader is to encourage those with the capability to lead, regardless of their title or tenure.

4.3.3 Theme 3

Trust: learning to share with peers

The fourth question was: How do you personally feel about writing in the labs with your colleagues? How do you feel about sharing your writings in the labs with your colleagues?

This question sought information to determine how a teacher felt writing with colleagues and sharing their writing with colleagues. Throughout the teacher responses to this fourth question evidence of the distributive leadership principles: practice, interaction, and attention to design, emerged repeatedly.

Teachers admitted feeling uncomfortable sharing their personal writing during the first professional development labs three years ago. As they developed trust in each other, sharing became more natural and carried over into their writing instruction. In talking about sharing personal writings in front of colleagues, teacher 4 admitted that: “Initially it was hard for me but then there was that trust factor. We began to trust each other in a different way as colleagues. It took me awhile to overcome that but when I realized there was trust, it was safe, and it was ok because whatever I shared was valued. I learned to share and it was the best thing I ever did

because then you feel you can share with your students and then you understand how your students feel. I now understood my kids' reluctance and the need to build trust." These comments seem to be consistent with Desimone (2011) which found effective professional development includes a focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content. Teachers assumed the role of student and participated not only in the writing but the sharing of their writing in front of colleagues. In addition, when teachers assumed the role of the learner (student) they also align with Desimone's suggestion that professional development should involve active learning where teachers get involved and receive feedback instead of passively listening. The writing labs were designed to engage teachers through writing and collaborating. As a result of adhering to this attention to design, the teachers writing, sharing, and collaboration carried over into their classrooms as evidenced when teacher 3 stated: "I always felt ok sharing something that I liked but I think learning to share something that I don't like has really been valuable to me to take back to the classroom. When we are sharing at a writing lab with our colleagues and realizing that some of our kids feel like that every day. To hear a colleague validate my writing whether it's a word or a line or a common feeling that is shared makes you realize that there is something here, something to build from. The building of trust occurs, regardless if my writing is good or bad. It's been a huge milestone for me as a learner to take that back to my room. Now I get excited to share my wrong turns with my kids and you can just feel the kids sense of relief when I scratch through a whole paragraph or change 17 things in front of them. You see them realize that this (mistakes) is ok to do. Sharing aloud in the writing labs has been the biggest learning, the main thing that really carried over into our writing class with students." Teacher 5's response reinforced the importance of trust when he/she remarked: "In the past few years I had never written in front of my students. I didn't think of that. I would tell

them what to do and think that they had it. But until I started to write, I was like ‘oh wow’. This makes such a difference. They see my struggles, they see me writing, and now they look for me and say: ‘When are you going to share yours?’ They want to see me writing. It’s just nice that I can share in front of my principal even if it’s not a great piece. My principal is ok with that and encourages me to try it. It was intimidating at first since I didn’t know if I was a good writer but that’s probably what my students feel. To show my students how to overcome that and to show them that we all have different abilities has been helpful.” The teachers’ comments suggest a foundation of trust that was built from risk taking in a safe learning environment. These comments corroborate the idea that one way to foster the learning of an adult is through an inquiry approach (Menter, Elliot & Hulme, 2011). Inquiry allows teachers to try to “develop some new knowledge and understanding” (p.3), while they attempt to “destabilize previous ways of working” (p.19). The teachers’ confidence was developed through a collaborative, risk free environment that fostered capacity building (Harris, 2008; Knowles, 1955; Mezirow, 2003).

4.3.4 Theme 4

Compliance and Clarity: Adhering to shared values

One consistent finding with all four teachers suggested they are compliant rule followers who may seek out direction from individuals such as the principal or other colleagues. From a distributed leadership perspective, these results are in line with those of previous studies. Spillane et al. (2004) implemented a conceptual framework to account the *how* part of leadership that occurs in schools. Instead of viewing leadership as the result of one individual’s talents, they look at the overall “practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation” (p.11). Even

though the finding that these emerging teacher leaders were also at times followers and strived for direction from other individuals was unexpected in this evaluation, it further supports the idea of a distributed leadership perspective (see Appendix E: Elements of Leadership Practice). In other words, teacher leaders still expected the principal to do certain tasks such as establish deadlines or issue directives surrounding meeting dates and times. At the same time, these teacher leaders did not expect the principal to lead the actual tasks that were taught during the professional development writing lab.

Attention to clarity through the design and structure of each professional development writing lab informed teachers about their expectations. The investigator facilitated a Planned Course Outline schedule that defined the dates of the teacher writing labs and the specific lessons to be taught at those labs (see Appendix B: Gantt Chart Timeline for 2016-17 Inquiry). This allowed teachers to approach the writing labs with an increased appreciation, understanding and certainty. Teacher 5 reinforced their appreciation, increased understanding and certainty when he/she stated: “I love our planned course outline; I think that's been so helpful. When we turn papers in, it just keeps us knowing where we need to be. So many times you start to drag your feet and spend a couple more weeks on this, but this is where we need to be, this is where we are, and we have to move on to the next step. I really liked that piece of it. And then in our PLCs and just talking with everybody and everybody can share their experiences. For example, if they have any frustrations, if things aren't going well; like you (teacher 4) said, ‘We're struggling here and what can we do?’ It just keeps everybody on pace and everybody talking about it and the conversations moving.”

In addition, the teachers expressed how they felt stressed when other professional development lacked direction, clarity, or district follow-up. Discussing prior staff development

sessions conducted by outside presenters, teacher 3 expressed his/her feelings when he/she stated, “I often felt, even when we had a good in-service, that it’s like ‘bam’, we might hear about it a year later or never again. So then I begin to think, what do I do? And you feel stressed because I just got downloaded a two and a half hour binder of information. Do I have to figure out how to implement that? Is it required implementation? Is it a try it if you want? It’s the confusion of how do I do this and who I go to if I have a question?” In response to teacher 3’s comments, teacher 5 compared the schools’ professional development writing labs to prior in-services done by outside presenters by stating: “Outside presenters give you an email address or a phone number. How do I talk to this person or explain it to them? But to have colleagues in our building that I can come down to and say: ‘This is what I have, look at their work, and I can have somebody see it with me, and work with me on it makes such a difference.” Whether elements were criticized or complimented in the prior statements, the distributive leadership principle, attention to design, has much to do with their experiences. A lack of clarity from the district in regards to teacher expectations combined with their desire to be compliant caused these potential emerging leaders to feel stressed and uncertain. Expanding upon this theme to determine what distinguished this professional development from prior in-services, teachers commented more about traits that align with the attention to design. Teacher 3 specifically compared the two when he/she stated: “...but with the writing lab the expectation is this is continuing. We are coming back to this...we take it more seriously because we are going to share student work, we are getting together next month (writing lab) and there’s this expectation we will have to show for what we did.” These results seem to be consistent with other research which found the duration of professional development should be dispersed over at least one semester and include 20 or more hours of interaction (Desimone, 2011). A distinguishing characteristic of the professional

development writing labs vs. prior district professional development was continuity coupled with collaboration.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

While the focus of this evaluation study was in writing, the findings provided evidence to improve other subject areas of professional development processes in the future. The investigator learned that even though the principal should facilitate learning opportunities within organizational structures, teacher leaders can emerge when a distributed leadership perspective is implemented. The organizational structures were professional development labs where interactions consistently occurred over a two year period of time between administration, teacher leaders, and teacher followers. In addition to the structures, the investigator developed an understanding of the important role teacher leaders and followers hold within an organization. Regardless of their role, professional development participants were actively engaged in learning that was applicable to their content area over duration of time. Finally, teachers and principal participated together and built an interactive learning community that turned into a culture of continuous improvement. The findings of this evaluation study provide insights for empowering teachers through professional development using a distributed leadership perspective. As a result of the professional development action plan, evidence of distributive leadership was prominent in commentary from teacher 3, teacher 4, teacher 5, and teacher 6 during the focus group.

Evidence of teacher 3 included planning and providing demonstration writing lessons for grade level peers and classes. These demonstration lessons emerged from follow-up questions that were generated as a result of the learning that occurred in the professional development lab.

The lessons positioned teacher 3 to serve as a leader and to assist his/her peers in actualizing their learning alongside a colleague with an extensive depth of knowledge in the teaching of writing. In addition to providing demonstration writing lessons, teacher 3 also initiated and led team discussions surrounding writing at the team's grade level professional learning community meetings each week throughout the school year. Meeting minutes reflected the discussions and follow-up learning that transpired.

Evidence of teacher 4 included the willingness to share student writing samples and lessons during the professional development labs with his/her colleagues. Student samples afforded colleagues the opportunity to analyze student work and discuss the explicit instruction that led to the student work. Writing samples shared by teacher 4 were also utilized as models for teachers to utilize within their respective classrooms with students; enabling students to discuss the qualities of writing within each piece.

Evidence of teacher 5 included mentoring a cross-grade level colleague with less experience in the teaching of writing. Teacher 5 assumed the role as mentor. In addition to mentoring a colleague, he/she coached his/her students to in turn coach and mentor the cross-grade level colleague's students in peer-to-peer writing conferences. Upper elementary students mentored the lower elementary students in necessary revisions during each mode's study; talking about the qualities of writing that makes up each mode to raise the level of writing. (5th grade and 3rd grade teacher)

This evaluation study assessed how the principles of distributive leadership and the principles which underlie professional development informed the use of teacher led writing labs as a means of improving student writing. As a result of the assessment, this study revealed there were four leaders that emerged from this professional development effort. Along with identifying

the leaders, their actions were also described through evidence gathered in a survey, an observation, and focus group. Because of this evaluation, the principal can pursue the continuous improvement of future professional development initiatives by applying the significant, applicable evidence about the development and the product of the writing program. In other words, the principal has a better understanding how to improve other subject areas of professional development using the principles of distributive leadership coupled with the core features of effective professional development. Led by colleagues, this job embedded professional development effort built capacity across an entire school and distinguished itself from any previous efforts these staff members experienced. (Hannum, Martineau, & Reinelt 2006; Tananis, 2014).

5.1 PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

My participation was integral in the professional development writing labs and the promotion of the action plan initiative as it unfolded. Although teacher leaders had an important role in facilitating collaboration, the collegial environment was fully supported and encouraged by me. During each professional development writing lab, I assumed the role of the learner, wrote alongside teachers, shared with the group, and asked questions for clarifications. My role was validated during the focus group when teacher 3 stated:” You come to the morning meetings with us...you’ve experienced it with them...you can have conversation with them because you did it too. It's not just like the teachers are writing, you’re right alongside us writing.” My active participation challenged earlier research evidence from the literature review which claimed less time is spent on instructional activities by principals than any other activity (Hornig, et. al, 2010). Even though managerial tasks can dominate a principal’s schedule, research suggests these tasks have little or no direct impact on the student growth (Camburn et al., 2003). Research also shows that students who performed the lowest based upon state standardized tests had school administrators who spent the majority of their time on administrative tasks. On the other hand, principals spending time in administration tasks within organization management classifications showed the most significant impact on student performance (Correnti & Rowan, 2007). Establishing these classifications in this study occurred through the implementation of the distributed leadership principles: practice, interaction, and attention to design.

In order for this professional development writing lab to foster and allow leaders to emerge, I adhered to specific, research based norms. First and foremost, I aimed to solve the problem of low writing PSSA scores by getting the teachers to think before instructional changes occurred. (Heifetz, R., & Grashow, A., Linsky, M., 2009). I worked with teachers to identify the root cause and help those same teachers understand why learning how to write was as important for the adults as it was for our students. Some ways that I attempted to put technical solutions into place were: ask more questions, purposefully avoided providing support for a decision, increase the diversity of people that are part of seeking solutions, and lay out the facts for all to see in order to initiate “real conflicts in perspectives and values” (p. 111). Once teachers identified the elements of the adaptive challenge they validated the need to learn new strategies, moving away from avoiding conflict and towards solving the conflict (2009). In this specific study the conflict was lack of prior professional development in writing. The solution was a distributed leadership approach to professional development writing labs where the teachers of writing learned how to proficiently write.

Finally, I was aware that teachers may not resist the actual proposed change, writing labs, but the loss of something they perceive as valuable. (Heifetz, R., & Grashow, A., Linsky, M., 2009). That loss may mean a program, union resistance, or general perception. For example, some teachers relied on a basal program to teach writing prior to the professional development writing labs being implemented. Another situation regarding union resistance stemmed from directives. Specifically union representatives questioned direction from teacher leaders, perceiving that advice as directives vs. advice surrounding writing. As a result, I made certain to personally issue any directives to the staff that included information such as meeting dates, deadlines for assignments, and implementation of professional development lessons. Regardless

of the potential barriers that may have arisen, a key strategy employed when demonstrating adaptive leadership was for me to remind myself to avoid attempting it alone (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). This reasoning reinforces the need to build capacity through the teacher leaders across the school system to implement this sustainable change.

Establishing collegiality by learning alongside teachers and students resulted in a positive impact on classroom practices and student learning. Through first-hand professional development lab participation and follow-up individual conversations, a culture of trust emanated.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS

Professional development either *develops* teachers or *delivers* training to teachers. Professional development should promote growth and advancement of teachers; affording opportunity for the experience and possession of new skills. However, professional development is often delivered as a presentation in a top down didactic manner.

Developing and leading professional development that infuses into the school culture a degree of the depth and stability to withstand program challenges or political agendas is not for the faint of heart. Shifting a culture while staying under the radar is difficult. Heifetz & Grashow (2009) define adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p.14). Adaptive challenges can only be overcome when people change their “priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (p. 19). Addressing and solving adaptive challenges requires more time, although that investment of time is necessary to positively shift

the beliefs of a building's staff. Those beliefs are the foundational blocks that a principal can use to build a culture of continuous improvement.

As the principal, building a professional culture of writers has been difficult, but rewarding work. The rewards resulted from three specific actions: teachers developing their skills as writers, teacher leaders emerging as a result of job embedded professional development, and the principal assuming the role of a learner in the process.

Initiation of a focused professional development plan that centered on maturing and advancing the writing skills of teachers in grades 3-5 in the subject of writing instruction began three years ago at Heritage Elementary School. Because our school identified the "why" before the "what" or "how", we were able to move towards a culture of continuous improvement. Why our school focused on professional development writing labs was due to poor performance on the school's 2014 PSSA writing results. Since that time our school has concentrated on the use of adult focused and job embedded professional development to grow the writing skills of grade 3-5 classroom teachers.

We began with a belief that teachers of proficient writers are proficient writers themselves. Teachers who write proficiently are more likely to possess the skills to in turn teach students to write proficiently (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Recent studies confirm teachers have limited skills for writing proficiently in narrative, opinion, and informational genres (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Salah-Din & Miller, 2008; Kiuahara et al., 2009; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). If students are to become better writers, it was theorized that teachers needed to practice writing and study writing pedagogy to determine how and where to implement an improved writing curriculum. "No activity is worth doing unless it promises to make the central part of a teacher's work more successful and satisfying" (Sagor, 2000, p. 4). Working together teachers and

principal created a professional development action plan that was designed to improve pedagogy in the teaching of writing.

Professional Development occurs in a variety of contexts and its success is dependent on the learner, the content, as well as the overall culture. Regardless of the context, the purpose of PD is to “increase teacher knowledge and instruction in ways that translate into enhanced student achievement” (Desimone, 2011, p. 68). In some schools professional development can be seen simply as the context of where the learning occurs for a teacher. These contexts can be conversation among colleagues, a job embedded learning lab within a regular PLC meeting, or a formal in-service day (Borko, 2004). Regardless, the outcome of professional development should positively affect the culture of the building.

Seeking purposeful school change in the teaching of writing led principal and teachers to step away from technical fixes and circle back to the starting point. In turn we created a collaborative group, led by our colleagues that met for monthly professional development writing labs. Teachers and the principal adopted the role of student writers, opened up their notebooks, put pencil to paper, and took the first step in refining our understanding of the writing process. The question presented to the adults in the writing lab was: “How can we get better at what we do and how do we create a culture of writers in our school?” The answer was (and still is being) found by learning alongside each other in a community of learners in a co-constructivist environment. With trust and persistence, teachers are validated by progress as a result of doing the same work they are asking their students to do.

Our school’s professional development focused on the critical features of teacher learning experiences vs. the structure (Desimone, 2009). We focused on the process vs. the product (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). The experiences put into place were designed to be authentic

tasks that will grow the writing skills of teachers in grades 3-5. Specifically, during monthly professional development writing labs, teachers wrote in narrative, persuasive, and expository genres and shared those writings with colleagues. The intent of writing labs was to improve writing instruction in the classroom by improving the writing skills of the teachers. Instruction would not improve until the ability of teachers to effectively practice writing improved. As Elmore (2011) says, “I used to think that people’s beliefs determined their practices. And now I think that people’s practices determine their beliefs” (p. 7). A teacher’s belief that they can write and, as a result, effectively teach writing, is formed from the practice they experience in the writing lab. However, before teachers were asked to *implement* writing instruction in the classroom, they first had to *learn* how to write. Implementation occurs after learning occurs. Elmore (2016) specifically states that “implementation is something you do when you already know what to do; learning is something you do when you don’t yet know what to do” (p. 531). He goes on to discuss that when we as leaders endorse policies that ask others to implement something before they understand, we are asking them to be someone other than themselves. In the end this can negatively impact culture which could have detrimental effects. The potential effect policy can have on the culture is reinforced by Elmore when he quotes politician Fred Salvucci who stated: “Culture eats policy for breakfast”.

Overall, students and teachers are experiencing improving PSSA results in writing, teacher leaders are emerging, interactions about writing instruction among staff continue to foster, and a clear majority in grades 3-5 are participating in the process with positive attitudes. These elements have the ability to grow and foster a culture of writers centered on continuous improvement. All ideas and practices that are beneficial to the culture of learning are accessible, transparent, and understood by administration, teachers and students. This culture provides a

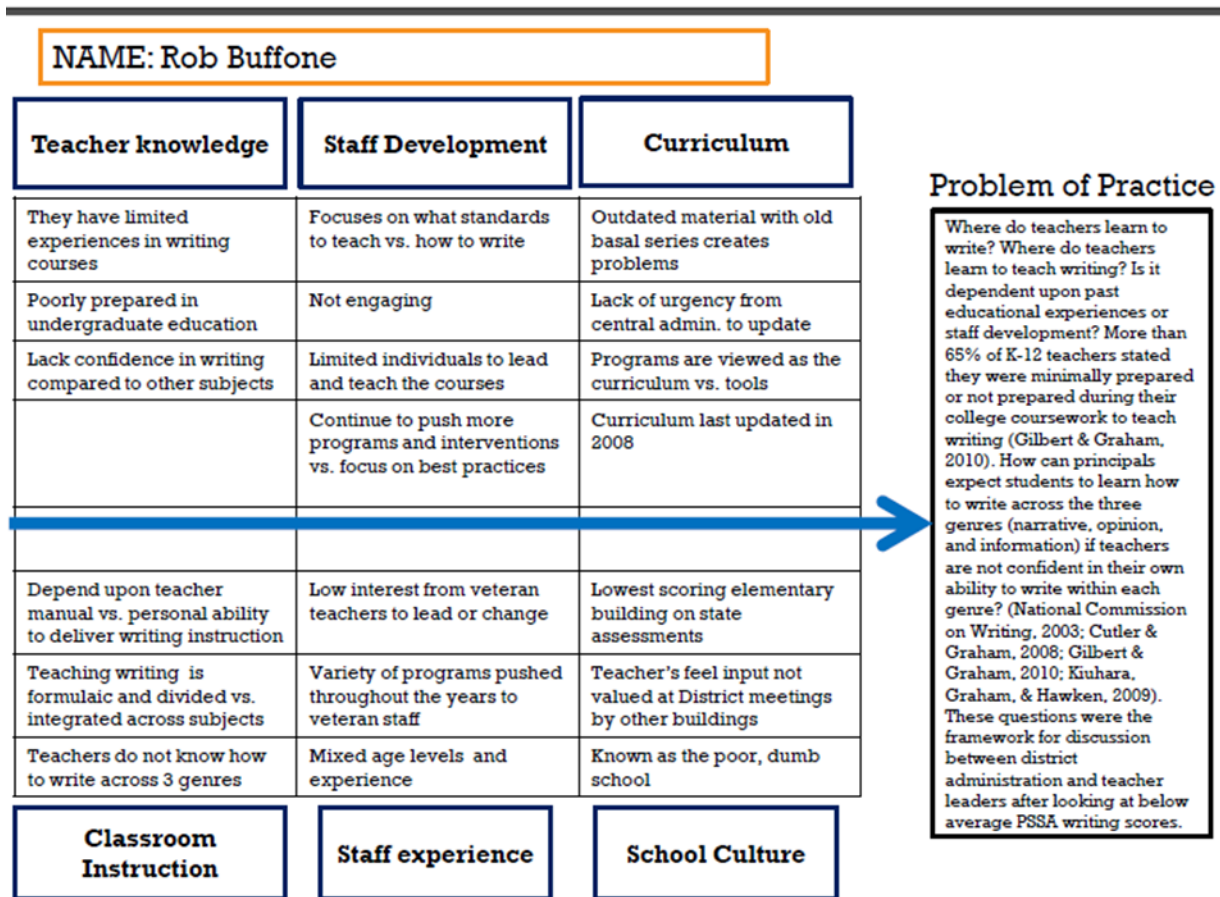
place for adults and students to learn based upon their current level of understanding (Elmore, 2016).

For the culture of writing to be effective it must include two very important components: teachers as writers and students as writers. This professional development journey was aimed to arm teachers with the tools and strategies needed to move beyond the dead end technical fixes of the past and forward into systemic change in how writing is learned and taught. This is important because the transparent, accountable environment that evolved inside our writing labs has supported teacher interactions in other subjects and settings outside of the writing labs. Interactions that began around the subject of writing strengthened collegial relationships that helped create an open, transparent climate. Fullan (2008) describes transparency as “the openness about what practices are most strongly connected to successful outcomes” (p. 99). Collaborative conversations that started around the subject of writing now exist in other subject areas. By sharing resources throughout this process, the school’s success can inspire and foster continued growth and sustainable change not only in writing, but in all subject areas.

The conclusion of this study yielded a journey of collaborative self-discovery as writers and teachers of writing. The case can be made that in order to begin to seek purposeful school change in the teaching of writing; teachers must first be open to seeking refinement and understanding of writing as writers themselves. As with any research worth studying, this evaluation concludes with these realizations. First, the best teachers of writing are teachers who write and second, invitations to participate are meant to cultivate a group alliance, not a solitary movement. Fostering and supporting participating teachers and teacher leaders on their journey advocates for the emergence of leaders and the transference of attained knowledge and pedagogy among teachers through purposeful and results oriented professional learning communities.

APPENDIX A

Figure 1. Root Cause Analysis



APPENDIX B

Figure 2. Gantt chart timeline for 2016-17 inquiry

<i>Writing Lab Activities & Inquiry Schedule 2016-17</i>	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Observation of teachers in labs	X	X	X	X				
Focus Group					X			
Teacher Planning Meetings	X	X		X		X		X
Narrative-Memoir, Personal Narrative		X						
Information Research			X	X				
Opinion/Argument Literary Essay				X	X	X		
Opinion/Argument Persuasive Essay						X		
Narrative Writing Biography								X
Information/Opinion/Narrative – On-Demand Writing Marathon			X				X	
Before School Argumentative Writing Lab						X	X	X

APPENDIX C

WRITING RESEARCH SURVEY

Writing Research Survey

Q1 Select the name(s) of the staff member(s) here at Heritage that you go to for advice about teaching writing. Do not choose your own name.

- ☐ Teacher 1
- ☐ Teacher 2
- ☐ Teacher 3
- ☐ Teacher 7
- ☐ Teacher 8
- ☐ Teacher 4
- ☐ Teacher 9
- ☐ Teacher 10
- ☐ Teacher 11
- ☐ Teacher 12
- ☐ Teacher 13
- ☐ Teacher 14
- ☐ Teacher 5
- ☐ Teacher 6
- ☐ Teacher 15
- ☐ Principal

Q2 Why did you go to (name of selected person here)

Display This Question:

If Drag the name(s) of the staff member(s) here at Heritage that you go to for advice about teaching...
q://QID3/SelectedChoicesCount Is Equal to 0

Q3 Thank you for participating. Based upon your response, you haven't gone to anybody for advice about teaching writing. If you had to choose someone, who might you go to?

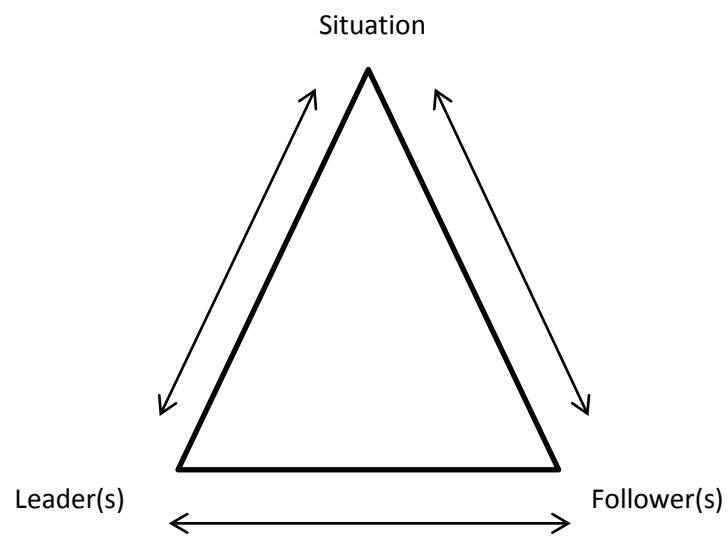
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How was this writing lab experience different than previous professional development experiences in which you have participated?
 - a. What was different?
 - b. How did that difference impact your understanding of writing
 - c. How did that difference impact your ability to write
 - d. How did that difference impact your interaction with colleagues
 - e. How did that difference impact your interaction with your principal?
 - f. How did that difference impact your writing instruction in the classroom?
2. How do you feel about professional development focused on the writing process?
 - a. How do you feel about writing in the labs with your colleagues?
 - b. How do you feel about sharing your writings in the lab with your colleagues?
3. Has your participation in the writing lab altered your instructional decisions in relation to your approach to the teaching of writing?
4. In what ways did the writing lab support collaboration with your colleagues and principal that directly impacted the teaching of writing?
5. In what ways did the writing lab support collaboration with your colleagues and principal outside of the labs that directly or indirectly impacted your teaching of writing?
6. As a result of participating in the writing lab, what questions have you reflected on or researched to deepen your knowledge and/or experience of the content? How has this influenced your approach to the teaching of writing?

APPENDIX E

Figure 3. Elements of leadership practice



(Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004)

APPENDIX F

Survey Responses

<p>Why did you go to teacher 5?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western PA Writing Project, classroom experience, prior conversations • I go to teacher 5 because he/she has the experience of teaching the writing curriculum in past years. We share ideas and resources about what will work best with the students. I also like to confirm that what I am doing in my classroom is meeting the writing expectations of fifth graders • Pitt Writing Fellow; Close personal and professional friend • Teacher 5 is a Writing Project Fellow and works to emulate Lab lesson structures in her ELA classroom. Teacher 5 is a great resource to co-plan with and get important feedback from that feeds into future labs
<p>Why did you go to teacher 4?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom experience, prior conversations • I went to him/her to compare across grade levels what expectations are in common core standards and on PSSA writing assessments • Teacher 4 takes Lab lessons to fruition in his/her classroom. I go to teacher 4 for follow-up feedback and suggestions for future writing labs
<p>Why did you go to teacher 3?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western PA Writing Project, classroom experience, prior conversations • Teacher 3 is part of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project and teaches at Young Writers. He/She is very knowledgeable about writing. • Teacher 3 is a great person to bounce ideas off of • Proximity, experience, writer's institute • Pitt Writing Fellow; Close personal and professional friend • Teacher 3 is a Writing Project Fellow who designs and implements lessons that mimic the structure of the lessons conducted in the Lab
<p>Why did you go to teacher 6?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western PA Writing Project, classroom experience, prior conversations, leadership and vision with writing labs • Teacher 6 is the person that has encouraged me to write more. I have become a better writer because of him/her. Any question I have, he/she is able to answer for me. Teacher 6 has a variety of resources that I am able to use in my classroom • Expertise • I talk to teacher 6 about writing because he/she has immense knowledge of writing and is able to share so many resources. I can go to him/her with a specific writing question or problem and he/she is able to give me multiple things to try back in the classroom with the students • He/She is the writing expert. I respect him/her high quality, rigorous approach to raising the standard for all writers • I went/go to teacher 6 for guidance in next steps in writing within various genres.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experience, writer's institute• Pitt Writing Fellow with extensive writing and teaching of writing experience |
|--|

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